

## **Families of the 4%**

**By: Candie Dalton**

My son, Ian, was 11-years old the first time I took him to a therapist out of concern over his anger, odd behaviors and sinking depression. The therapist was the first of many to tell me there was nothing unusual about Ian...just average teenage hormones. At the age of 14, he was diagnosed with depression and prescribed an antidepressant.

In Colorado, minors at the age of 14 have the right to make their own medical and mental health decisions. The only way for a parent to obtain information is if the child signs a release of information. This law, combined with HIPAA, created an endless battle for me trying to help my son. I couldn't schedule appointments for him unless he expressly stated I had the authority to do so. Ian is one of the many who experience anosognosia, or a lack of awareness that he has a mental illness.

At 16 Ian experienced his first psychotic episode. He began communicating in word salad, was thought blocking and became very disorganized. I tried to make him an appointment, but he had not authorized me to do so. I tried to convince him to make his own appointment, but he didn't feel there was anything wrong with him. I tried to get the school involved, but they didn't have the resources. I watched my son decompensate right in front of me.

Ten days later, I found my son unconscious in the backyard. The ambulance rushed him to the emergency room where he stopped breathing. They registered his blood alcohol level at .426. The lethal limit is .50. He was on a ventilator in ICU for three days before being transferred to an inpatient psychiatric hospital. It took my son almost dying to get him into the hospital.

At the age of 18, Ian was hospitalized for the 5th time after threatening to kill someone with a butcher knife to make the voices stop. After his discharge the insurance company outsourced his treatment because they could not provide the level of support he needed. After talking with Ian for less than 30 minutes, his new psychiatrist tried to discontinue his medications because he denied having hallucinations or other symptoms of schizophrenia.

After two suicide attempts, six hospitalizations, a dozen other ER visits, three arrests, homicidal threats, many medication trials, and four diagnoses Ian is now relatively stable. He is 19 years old living independently despite the schizophrenia. I watch for little clues every time I see him to assess how he's doing: the self-talk, disorganization, collection of random objects, cleanliness of his clothes, how much soap and shampoo he's using, how many pieces of paper are covering places from where he's being watched, and how many holes have been punched or kicked in his walls.

For years we dealt with the onset of schizophrenia without any help, without any understanding, without any hope.

I'm thankful my story doesn't end in tragedy. I know there will be many more challenges in our future. I want to make sure when things aren't going well that I can help my son get the interventions and treatments he needs to keep him and others safe.

Thank you.